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THE ROUND TABLE

A MEANS OF INCREASING LITERARY APPRECIATION

Many of us still recall with pleasure certain hours in our student days when our teacher of English turned from the impending discussion of the meaning of "kerns and gallowglasses" to spend the hour in reading to us some of the less known verse or prose in which he himself took an especial delight. We also remember how short that hour seemed, and how, when that wise teacher offered to loan the volume to the class, we envied the fellow-student who captured it first, and how we hurried after school to the public library in the hope of securing another copy of the book. Later in life, perhaps, some of us have watched the reacting of a scene similar to that which Lowell has caught in his verse; a rough man in a railway coach, holding a group of his fellow-passengers by reading to them from a volume of Burns.

Possibly, too, not a few of us have known Browning clubs whose members have sat circlewise on the floor, clasping hands in the fire-light, listening to a leader repeat "Rabbi Ben Ezra," and exclaiming at its conclusion, "O, how grand!" Then, it may be, our gorge has risen; and we have voiced our conviction that any valuable appreciation of literature was not thus to be gained—that the learner must rather "scorn delight and live laborious days."

The pros and cons of this matter have been thrashed out frequently of late; and we shall probably do well to agree with Sir Roger that there is much to be said on both sides. Without question, however, teachers of English are coming to realize as never before the value of unpretentious, sympathetic oral reading as a means of interpreting literature, and have given much attention to the problem of making such reading a more effective instrument for good both in the school and in the community at large.

In attempting a partial solution of this problem, the English department of the University of Illinois has been carrying on for three years a series of informal readings. These readings, which are given for the most part by the members of the department, are held each Tuesday evening between seven and eight o'clock. Experience has shown that it is wise to begin this series of twelve or fourteen readings early in the

autumn, so that they may be completed before the more numerous demands for time and the less favorable weather incident to the closing months of the school year have offered their distractions. The necessary arrangements have been made by a committee of the members of the department, who have divided the tasks involved so that these have not proved a very heavy burden to any one person. The chief announcements of these readings have consisted of small programs, about the size of a postal card, bearing the entire list of dates, readers, and subjects, and of large bulletin placards advertising the readings for each month. Notices of each meeting are given to the college daily and to the local city papers.

The subjects chosen have ranged the field of English literature. Readings from Chaucer and from *Gawain and the Green Knight* were unusually successful. Occasionally selections have been taken from such standard authors as Dickens, Irving, Lanier, and Lincoln; but for the most part they have been chosen from later poets, such as Dobson, Galesworthy, Kipling, and Riley; from contemporary dramatists—Shaw, Lady Gregory, Barrie, and Stephen Phillips; or from such short-story writers as Stevenson, Bunner, and O. Henry. At times the reader has gone farther afield, as in giving "Scenes from Russian Novelists" and "Dramatic Incidents in American History." The program for the present year included, among others, selections from Richard Hovey, William Vaughn Moody, *Bayou Tales*, a Play of Maeterlinck's, Francis Thompson, the *Spoon River Anthology*, John Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, Lafcadio Hearn, and Gogol's *Inspector General*.

The success of these readings has been very gratifying. The interest has grown steadily from year to year, till the audiences now average about three hundred and fifty. This autumn the Department of Classics is offering a similar course, and the Department of Modern Languages has considered following its example. Significant, too, is the demand made upon the library and upon local book dealers for copies of the authors taken up at these readings. Without question, such a demand has been the best fruit of our efforts.

While some such plan as that just outlined may be carried out more easily in a college community, perhaps, than elsewhere, it has been the experience of the present writer that a similar scheme is thoroughly feasible even under less favorable conditions. A gratifyingly large number of high-school teachers have some pet author whom they are willing to share with the public; and also every town has at least a few good readers who may be induced to co-operate in the plan. Of

course one must fight shy of the curfew-shall-not-ring-tonight species of elocutionist, for a large part of the value of these readings lies in their very informality. In nearly every community one will find some Scotchman, still retaining the bur of his nativity, whose reading of Burns, or of Barrie, or of Crockett will swing a new world into the students' ken. Frequently these readings may be planned so as to observe the anniversary of the birth of some author, and thus the public interest and the size of the audience may be increased. But, whatever the number present, the room chosen for the reading should not be too large; small space well filled is far better than a large one thinly sprinkled with listeners.

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A USE FOR THE TEXTBOOK OF "THOUGHT"

From the recent discussion of the purpose of the many textbooks now issued for "thought courses," a valuable use for such books suggests itself. Professor Thomas, in his article in the February number, is of the opinion that our college Freshmen should take as their point of departure "not some essay on the ideals of a college education, but some contemporary incident in the life of the students;" not "the more fundamental and far-reaching movements of thought of our times," but such movements of thought as they may by chance have themselves. Admitting that the point of departure should in all reason be the student's own experience and present thought equipment, should the more or less unwilling journeys from that humble base to larger fields be taken at random? Here is where the use for the "thought-course" textbook comes in. Let it be the text for the teacher, not for the defenseless student. Let the teacher take the system of ideas set forth as something which he may hope that a few of his students will comprehend when they are Seniors. Then, with the plan of the book before him, and with its ideas as his armament for offense and defense, let him in class discussion and theme assignments, by a judicious mixture of drawing out and pouring in, put his students as far along the road toward appreciation of "the more fundamental movements of thought of our time" as is possible.

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